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INFO RUEHZL/EUROPEAN POLITICAL COLLECTIVE PRIORITY
RUEHAS/AMEMBASSY ALGIERS PRIORITY 3886
RUEHRB/AMEMBASSY RABAT PRIORITY 5947
RUEHLA/AMCONSUL BARCELONA PRIORITY 1830
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SUBJECT: AMBASSADOR,S MEETING WITH FORMER PRESIDENT FELIPE GONZALEZ

Classified By: Classified By: Ambassador Eduardo Aguirre for reasons 1.4 (b) & (d)

11. (C) Former Spanish President Felipe Gonzalez told Ambassador Aguirre March 24 that the ETA ceasefire represents the "best chance ever" for ending ETA violence once and for all. Gonzalez, still one of the leading luminaries of the Spanish Socialist Party, but not in the inner circle of current Spanish President Zapatero, claimed the opportunity for peace with ETA now is more realistic than during the 14-month truce ETA implemented in 1998-1999, during the Aznar administration. Gonzalez emphasized that this was "information, not opinion" and stressed this was an historic opportunity. Gonzalez said that Zapatero was "playing it right," and that Zapatero has said that if ETA comes forward with more specific ideas, Zapatero would be prepared to ask Parliament this summer for approval to begin negotiations. Gonzalez told the Ambassador that the government is also working hard on the key issue of providing funding/living expenses for the families of imprisoned ETA terrorists.

12. (C) On Iran, Gonzalez claimed that Putin, probably during his recent visit to Madrid, had told him that Russia would agree to enrich Iranian uranium in return for spent fuel. Gonzalez asserted that Putin had also told him that Russia would work to get G-8 agreement to guarantee non-aggression against Iran if Iran agreed to the deal. Gonzalez claimed that he is in contact with the President of Iran and "major Ayatollahs" on this issue.

13. (C) Gonzalez also discussed the Maghreb, particularly Western Sahara, saying that at this stage there is little hope for resolution. But, Gonzalez asserted, the Moroccans are "honest players," in contrast, he said, to the Algerians who are not. Echoing the Zapatero government, he urged a more visible and active US role on the Sahara issue. The Ambassador said the time was not right for such a role and if there would be a time in the future, the goal must be finite and achievable. Ambassador Aguirre also explained that as President Bush neared the end of his term of office, he would not want to renew engagement and then leave unfinished business.

14. (C) Ambassador Aguirre conveyed greetings from former President Bush, who had recently met with Gonzalez while they were guests of the current President of Panama. He thanked Gonzalez for meeting with WHA A/S Tom Shannon during Shannon's recent visit to Madrid. Gonzalez agreed the visit was useful and noted that for both Spain and the US the issue of Cuba and its eventual transition offered great

opportunities and great risks.

¶5. (C) During the course of the meeting, Gonzalez freely acknowledged to the Ambassador that he has been on the margins of the Zapatero government, but as Zapatero has become more confident in his role, he is becoming more willing to listen to his advice and that of other previous major party figures.

¶6. (C) Gonzalez claimed to the Ambassador that Secretary Rice had "reached out to him" and suggested that he meet with her. He also said that this discussion with her was not orchestrated through the Zapatero government.

¶7. (C) Comment: Former President Gonzalez is well regarded by PSOE stalwarts, who would like to see him more involved in a role similar to an elder statesman working alongside current PSOE leaders. No doubt Gonzalez has an excellent grasp of world issues particularly those involving Latin America and maintains contacts with many world leaders, current and former that would be helpful to Zapatero,s government. The question is how extensively Zapatero and company will use him. The Ambassador plans to meet with Gonzalez periodically; from our perspective, Gonzalez is a useful interlocutor but clearly has his own agenda as he deals with various international issues -- which sometimes coincides with ours but at times does not.
AGUIRRE